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These Are the Fashion Magazines

and the Women Editors Who Run Them

By MARYLIN BENDER

IF they could overhear what Betsy Talbot Blackwell has been saying lately, many of the corporate wives, If den mothers, suburban chatelaines and gainfully employed women of a certain age would come charging out from under their hairdryers (which is where most of the reading of fashion magazines is probably done) crying "Super!" "Pow!" and "Smashing!"

Mrs. Blackwell is an indefatigable, brunette grandmother, the editor of Mademoiselle and is one of the inventors of the youth market. Just 31 years ago, she edited the first college issue of a fashion magazine. It was a device for rescuing both Mademoiselle and the fashion departments of stores out of the August doldrums, and it worked.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery but it can also be construed as invasion and trespass. In the last few years, all the bibles of American fashion—Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, Glamour and Seventeen, which is classified as a woman's service magazine but undeniably shapes the fashion thinking of the nation's younger teenagers—have been romping in the same territory. It's been go-go with youth, vroom-vroom to outer space and hail to the same idols (like Mia Farrow, Francoise Hardy and Julie Christie).

What About the 'Non-Young' Woman?

In the privacy of her cluttered aerie 18 floors above Grand Central Station, Mrs. Blackwell has declared on more than one occasion "I'm going to edit a new magazine called Madame. No one is doing anything for the non-young woman and she has money to spend."

No sooner has her statement been jubilantly received, however, then Mrs. Blackwell retreats, pleading fatigue and loyalty to her present audience of 18 to 25 year olds (some of whose parents reprimand her for publishing articles on such topics as the trend among single women in that age group to have affairs with married men).

Somewhat the same sentiment, though, has been voiced by William M. Fine, the 44-year-old publisher of Harper's Bazaar. "Everyone is saying that by 1967, 50 per cent of the population will be under 25. Well, we are going to be for the 50 per cent over 25." On its July cover, Bazaar features a wildly striped dress from Paraphernalia, the American Mod hangout, and baby shoes.

Significantly, in the first five months of this year, Harper's Bazaar showed a loss of 4 per cent in advertising linage. Vogue registered a one per cent decline whereas the three younger magazines showed slight to considerable gains.

Mr. Fine said he believed that one fiber producer may have decreased its advertising in Bazaar as a result of its displeasure with the controversial edition of April 1965.

'What's Happening' Was Unsettling

Nancy White, Bazaar's 50-year-old editor who still plays six to eight sets of tennis on a Saturday, handed the editing of that issue to Richard Avedon, the photographer, who was then celebrating his 20th anniversary with the magazine. Mr. Avedon, who has since transferred to Vogue, whose editor-in-chief, Diana Vreeland, is also a Bazaar graduate, used the opportunity to show "What's Happening." Along with a glossary of in-most lingo, he dished up the Beatles, underground filmmakers, Pop artists, Jean Shrimpton (the British Mod mannequin with swinging earrings and rumpled locks), girlish astronauts encased in silver tights and plastic helmets or "frugging the fat away" in "tough little jerseys" by Rudi Gernreich.

Re-examined today, that issue looks like an accurate report of the youth convulsion that has seized fashion and other forms of mass culture. "It was a creative masterpiece and a commercial compromise," Mr. Fine acknowledged.

A spokesman for the fiber company denied that advertising had been withdrawn because of corporate pique with the editorial content of the magazine but he said, "A lot of people feel that the two top fashion books are so far out they are not talking to the consumer any more."

Indeed, there have been rumblings of discontent from the fashion industry as well as from those hairdryer readers who believe that elegance has been scuttled in favor of the Mod mentality. Many women, however, think that they have been rejected by youth-worshiping designers and merchants as well as by fashion editors.

The magazines defend themselves on two grounds. First, say they have always been misunderstood. The photographs of the models in ungainly poses, and outrageous attire are not to be taken literally. They are deliberate exaggerations to dramatize a fashion concept or to plant an idea to which the public's eye eventually becomes accustomed.

"I always felt the leotard was the future and it has come to pass," said Diana Vreeland, looking back to a photograph in October 1962 Vogue of the lower half of a woman's body clad in tights. It was the beginning of her double-barreled campaign for stretch fabrics and patterned hosiery that became an epidemic last winter.

Last June, the cover of Vogue had Jean Shrimpton peering out from under a Dynel wig cut like a thatched roof. "It was meant only as a fantaisie," said Mrs. Vreeland who applies French pronunciation to words like her name and double face fabric. "I don't see the world walking around in it. Fashion must have its little coquetteries." But sister in the Condé Nast Publications isn't kidding about women augmenting their hairdos with Dynel wigs and switches.

When Vogue showed Verouschka, the mannequin, lolling on the sands in nothing but a pair of ostrich chaps or with her body painted with leopard spots, Mrs. Vreeland did not intend the readers to head for the beach stark naked. The painted lady simply underscores her bias for the body beautiful.

How to Be Attractive While Unbeautiful

"You don't have to be born beautiful to be wildly attractive," said Mrs. Vreeland, who has carried her lifelong crusade for physical improvement ("a proper body, a proper walk, a proper stance") right into the pages of Vogue, whose largest category of advertisers are the makers of beauty products.

The second defense makes no apology for the pursuit of youth.

The Vogue reader "has gotten slightly younger—and richer, she's 33 years old, that's her median age," says S. I. Newhouse, Jr. Vogue's publisher whom everyone calls Si (pronounced Sigh). His father bought control of Condé Nast Publications, of which Vogue is the flagship, in 1959. Then he acquired Street & Smith Publications, one of whose components was Mademoiselle.

Vogue may contain "younger ideas than those just right for our median age but that's because there's no great separation between the so-called young woman and the mature woman," said Mr. Newhouse, 37, whose tiny, blond mother, Mitzi Newhouse, looks more like a super-chic girl doll than a woman whose oldest grandchild is a teen-ager.

Vogue has a circulation of 444,805, two-thirds of it based on subscriptions, which it makes no aggressive attempt to increase. "We don't print more copies

Continued

Soc 4-01.1 Mademoiselle
Soc 4-01.1 Vogue
Soc 4-01.1 Harper's Bazaar
Soc 4-01.1 Glamour
Soc 4-01.1 Seventeen

Pers. Blackwell, Betsy T.
Pers. Fine, Wm. M.
Pers. White, Nancy
Pers. Vreeland, Diana
Pers. Newhouse
Pers. Johnson, Kathleen
Pers. Phillips, Carol
Pers. McMurtry, Rosemary
Pers. Haupt, Enid